

Powerful questions

Critical Challenge

Critical Challenges

Critical Task

Formulate a *powerful* question for a classroom guest.

Overview

In preparation for a visit by a classroom guest, students brainstorm criteria for a *powerful* question. In pairs, students use the criteria to assess questions they have generated individually. Each student selects a powerful question to ask of the guest.

Requisite Tools

Background knowledge

- knowledge of the guest speaker and the topic



Criteria for judgment

- criteria for a powerful question (e.g., asks for a lot of information, open-ended, requires thought)



Critical thinking vocabulary

- criteria



Thinking strategies



Habits of mind



Suggested Activities

- ◆ Explain that a guest will be coming in the near future to talk about some topic that the class has been studying. Provide background about the guest and invite students to consider what they would like to learn from this guest: “What would be a really good question—a really *powerful* question—to ask?”

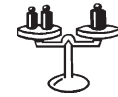


knowledge of the guest and topic

- ◆ If the class has not previously worked with the notion of “criteria” provide a definition (e.g., criteria are how we recognize whether something is what we say it is) and invite students to provide examples of criteria for familiar things (e.g., What does a nice person look like? do? sound like? What would a nasty person look like? do? sound like?).



- ◆ As a class, brainstorm criteria for the critical task:
What makes a *powerful* question?



Ask the class to select up to five criteria that they think are most important in recognizing a powerful question.

criteria for powerful questions

Criteria for powerful questions

- *give you lots of information*
- *are specific to the person or situation*
- *are open-ended—can't be answered by yes or no*
- *may be unexpected*
- *are usually not easy to answer*

This list of criteria was generated by a multi-aged class of K-3 students at Charles Dickens Annex in Vancouver, British Columbia.

- ◆ Ask students to think of one or two questions that they would like to ask of the guest. Encourage students to use the criteria in formulating their questions. Ask students to write out their question(s) or, if they are not able to do so, have a friend or the teacher do it for them.
- ◆ In pairs, students assess the quality of each others' question(s) using the criteria as a guide. Have students discuss how they could make their questions more powerful.
- ◆ Ask each student to write out the powerful question that they would like to ask of their guest. (Make it clear that students will NOT be required to ask their question if they do not wish to do so.) On the day of the visit by a guest, invite all students who so wish to ask the question they have prepared.

Powerful questions asked of a World War II veteran

- *Why did you fight in the war?*
- *Do you remember some of your friends from the war?*
- *Which countries did you fight over?*
- *Where did you live during the war?*
- *Were there any women in World War II? If so, what were their jobs?*
- *What started the fighting?*
- *Why was Canada involved?*
- *What was your safe place?*

These questions were generated using the criteria listed above by a multi-aged class of K-3 students at Charles Dickens Annex in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Evaluation

- ◆ Assess how well the first draft and final questions meet the criteria generated by the class.
- ◆ Assess students' understanding of the notion of criteria by asking each student to use pictures or words to record three criteria for a good pet.

Extension

- ◆ After the guest has left, ask students to consider which questions were the most powerful. Discuss these in light of the criteria generated by the class. Ask if students want to add to or revise their list of criteria of what makes a powerful question. Post the revised list in the classroom for future reference.
- ◆ Repeat this activity from time to time as other guests visit the class, or when students are framing questions that they would like to pursue when studying a topic.